

Combat patches: who's authorized

Soldiers who participated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) since Sept. 19, 2001 or in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) since March 3, 2003 are authorized to wear the shoulder sleeve insignia for former wartime service (SSI-FWTS), better known as the combat patch, for the unit to which they were assigned, according to a top uniform wear expert.

To qualify, soldiers must have been assigned to a unit participating in OEF or OIF, been deployed in the Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations and been under the command of the CENTCOM commander in chief.

"There is no time-in-theater requirement to be authorized to wear the combat patch. As long as a soldier meets all the criteria, the soldier may proudly display the combat patch," said Sgt. Maj. Walter O. Morales, Uniform Policy Branch, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1. He said the specific guidance lies in Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of the Uniform*, in paragraph 28-17.

Soldiers who were deployed in the area of operations on training exercises or in support of operations other than OEF or OIF are qualified for the patch if those exercises or operations became combat or support missions to the operation.

"The operations conducted in the Balkans have been of particular interest to leaders recently," Morales said. "Despite the combat-related incidents that often occur in the area, the operations there are considered peacekeeping missions."

Morales said another issue comes up frequently when people ask him about the combat patch. Often, soldiers are unsure of which unit's insignia they are authorized to wear.

"Soldiers assigned to a unit that, in its own right has a unit patch [such as a division or separate

brigade], will wear that unit's patch on the right shoulder," Morales said. "This is true regardless of the headquarters to which the unit is assigned."

He gave the example of the 3rd Infantry Division, which has a unit insignia of its own. Soldiers assigned to the 3rd ID would wear that patch whether the division was operating under V Corps, the XVIII Airborne Corps or any other higher headquarters.

"On the other hand, when individual soldiers or soldiers assigned to a unit without an insignia of its own deploys, soldiers wear the unit insignia of the unit they supported in the theater of operations," Morales said. An example would be a Reserve soldier called to active duty and attached to the 3rd ID. That soldier would wear the 3rd ID patch, not his stateside unit's patch.

With the fluid operations that are taking place, some soldiers will find themselves in a position where they are authorized to wear more than one combat patch. "By all means, soldiers who are eligible to wear more than one combat patch may choose which one they want to wear," Morales said. "They can even elect not to wear the SSI-FWTS at all."

Morales said NCOs should visit the Army Uniform Policy Web site at http://www.armyg1.army.mil/directorates/hr/hr_irp/default_uniform.asp. "The Web site also offers a direct link to an electronic version of the uniform wear regulation," he added.

As a final piece of advice, Morales said NCOs should ensure their soldiers retain copies of orders, whether they are assigned, attached or on temporary duty, and any other documentation the senior tactical commander provides before leaving the theater of operations. In addition to reflecting the soldier's participation in combat for the SSI-FWTS, the documents also support authorizations for other awards and decorations.

Deployed soldiers' promotions

Deployed specialists and sergeants may appear before the promotion board using their Enlisted Record Brief (ERB) as the official source document for assessing promotion points. Soldiers will have 60 days once they redeploy to submit a request for retroactive promotion adjustment for any source documents dated prior to the board appearance that the soldier did not have during the deployment, according to a Military Personnel Message issued in March. The changes will be added to Army Regulation 600-8-19, *Enlisted Promotions and Reductions*.

Adding the additional points upon redeployment may result in the soldier receiving a retroactive promotion.

Soldiers who do not submit the request within 60 days waive the opportunity and will only be able to add additional points during their reevaluations.

For more information, contact your Personnel Actions NCO or the U.S. Army Total Personnel Command at DSN 221-0266 or commercial (703) 325-0266 or e-mail tapcmspe@hoffman.army.mil.

War trophies

What soldiers can and cannot bring back from the battlefields in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom are clearly outlined in a memorandum from 3rd U.S. Army commanding general, Lt. Gen. David McKiernan.

According to McKiernan's memo, U.S. Central Command General Order 1a prohibits soldiers from taking weapons, ammunition and military equipment. Items soldiers may claim from the battlefield include helmets, head coverings, uniforms and uniform items, such as insignia, patches, canteens, compasses, rucksacks, pouches and load-bearing equipment. They may also bring back flags, military training manuals, books and pamphlets, posters, placards and photographs. They may bring other items if those items clearly pose no safety or health risk and are not otherwise prohibited by law or regulation. A comprehensive list of items prohibited by U.S. Customs can be found on pages 37-39 of "The CFLCC/377th TSC Redeployment Handbook." You may access the entire handbook on-line at: http://usasma.bliss.army.mil/journal/prohibited_items.doc

CIB & CMB

Infantry and Special Forces soldiers (other than medics) who satisfactorily perform Infantry or Special Forces duties in active ground combat in either Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) qualify for the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB), according to the chief of Military Awards Branch, U.S. Army Total Personnel Command (PERSCOM), Lt. Col. Thomas White.

Medical soldiers who accompany Infantry or Special Forces soldiers in active combat qualify for the Combat Medical Badge (CMB). Some medical personnel will qualify if they are assigned or attached to Armor or Cavalry units while the unit engaged in ground combat, provided that they were personally present and under fire, he said.

To view updated guidance on the CIB and CMB, go to PERSCOM Online at <https://www.perscomonline.army.mil/tagd/awards/awdmsg.htm> and look for the message, "Delegation of Wartime Approval Authority US JSOC." The message date/time group is 231306Z APR 03.

Soldiers who received the CIB or CMB for Operation Desert Storm in 1991 qualify for a second award based on participation in either OEF or OIF, White said. Nearly 22,000 soldiers qualified for the CIB and another 3,000 for the CMB during Desert Storm, he said.

White said soldiers become eligible for subsequent awards of these badges based on participation in combat during one or more of four conflict eras. The eras include World War II, Korea, the Vietnam Era that ended in March 1995 and the current Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) era that began Sept. 11, 2001. A star above the emblem on the badge denotes a second award.

Soldiers who participated in both OEF and OIF will qualify for only one award of the badge since the operations took place in the same conflict era, White said.

Soldiers who have questions on their eligibility for the award should contact their Personnel Services Detachment.

SMA's web page

Visit Sgt. Maj. of the Army Web site at <http://www.army.mil/leaders/sma>.

The NCO Journal online

Visit <http://usasma.bliss.army.mil/journal> to read issues all the way from 1991 to the present issue. The *Journal* is a quarterly publication dedicated to the professional development of the NCO Corps.